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# Developing an attachment to place through DIY

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# Developing an attachment to place through DIY

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## Abstract

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was conducted of semi-structured interviews, with the aim of investigating factors which affect attachment to, and identity within the home and whether completion of DIY projects has any effect on these. The participants were eight students from the University of Plymouth who signed up to the study as part of a course requirement, and two others who were known to the experimenter to have undertaken DIY within their respective homes. The findings show that the level of personalisation and sense of ownership a home owner feels within their property, are key factors to attachment and reflection of identity within the home. Implications of these findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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## **Acknowledgements**

The researcher would like to thank the supervisor, Tim Auburn for all his continual help and support throughout the duration of this project. Thanks also go to all of the participants for talking openly about their experiences during the interview process.

## **Statement of Ethical Compliance**

The data for the current research was collected in an ethically sound manner. Participants read a brief which explained the research topic and informed them that the interview would be audio recorded, and then later transcribed. It was explained that personal details would be kept confidential and anonymous. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point during or after the interview, as well as the right to decline to answer any question with which they felt uncomfortable. After agreeing to take part in the research participants were required to sign a consent form. After the interviews had been recorded participants were given a debrief to keep, which once more outlined the research question and contained their participant number, along with contact details of the researcher and the supervisor, should they wish to withdraw their data or find out the results of the research.

In order to ensure participant anonymity no personal information (e.g. name, age) was attached to the transcripts. Instead these were coded using the participants' number and gender (e.g. P#10M). To ensure confidentiality participants' personal details and transcripts were organised in a folder which was stored at the researcher's house and which was seen only by the researcher and the supervisor. No intentional deception or harm was used within this research.

## **Introduction**

'Home is where the heart is.' This common proverb has several meanings, including that people long to be at home (Spears, 2006), and that a person's true home is with the person or in the place that they love the most (Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2006). But what is it that makes people become attached to a place, and why do people become particularly attached to their homes?

Place attachment is a key part of environmental psychology, and as such has received an abundance of attention within a wide variety of disciplines (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Altman and Low (1992) have defined place attachment as the bonding of people to places. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) argue that the main characteristic of place attachment is the strong tendency of a person to maintain closeness to the place with which they hold a positive affective bond. Attachment to place has been investigated in a wide variety of settings, including older females who have remained in the house they once shared with their deceased husbands (Shenk, Kuwahara & Zablotsky, 2004), the sense of belonging to a place within those living in ageing buildings (Hung Ng, Kwong Kam & Pong, 2005) and the effects of moving to university on students' attachment to their homes (Chow and Healey, 2008). Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) have highlighted a distinction that is often made in the literature with regards to place attachment; the dimensions on which this

phenomenon is measured. Many studies have used the existence of social relationships within a place to measure attachment, as it is assumed that these will affect the degree of attachment experienced by individuals. From this, place attachment is actually viewed as attachment to the people with whom the individual associates with that place. The second dimension on which place attachment is often measured is the physical properties of the environment itself. Whilst Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) have shown that social attachment is a greater influence than physical attachment, these two dimensions come together to create the overall positive affective bond that an individual holds with a place.

In terms of attachment to the home Werner, Altman and Oxley (1985) explain that the home becomes a symbolic representation of relationships held within the house, due to its association with memories of these relationships. Gunter (2000, as cited by Gross & Lane, 2007) claimed that the home is central to basic human needs, higher-order needs, social relationships and personal identity. From a phenomenological point of view, the world is experienced and defined in terms of one central point; the home (Case, 1996) and this is one of the reasons that attachment to the home can be particularly strong. Several factors have been suggested as affecting a person's attachment to their home and these include the length of time a person interacts with the house (Hay, 1998 as cited by Kyle, Mowen & Tarrant, 2004), past experience within a house and memories of these experiences (Vorkinn & Riese, 2001 as cited by Kyle et al, 2004), and the social ties and memories of significant others within the house (Mesch & Manor, 1998 as cited by Kyle et al, 2004).

Within in the literature on attachment to home, a distinction has been made between the concepts of 'house' and 'home.' Dovey (1985) describes the house as an object within the environment which involves an investment of economic resources and which generates profit and power. In comparison the concept of 'home' describes the relationship that people have with the environment in which they live, a place where they invest time and emotion. The relationship with this place evolves over time. Dovey (1985) explains that the familiarity with which a person knows their own home leads this environment to become predictable, such that the stability of routine behaviour and experience within the home allows a person to relax. This familiarity and ability to relax builds on a sense of attachment and this causes people to talk about their home in an affectionate manner; thus describing it as a 'home' rather than a 'house'. Manzo (2003) also discusses the difference between house and home, in terms of the notion of 'dwelling.' Saegert (1985, as cited by Manzo, 2003) explains that 'dwelling' assumes that the experience of 'home' is about more than just the physical building; it is concerned with the 'active and mobile relationship of individuals to the physical, social, and psychological spaces around them.' Over the years several researchers have attempted to compose comprehensive lists of the many different meanings and understandings of the concept of 'home.' Of particular interest to this research is the work of Tognoli (1987, as cited by Moore, 2000), who claimed that there were five different attributes which clearly distinguish a 'home' from a 'house.' These attributes are; centrality, continuity, privacy, self expression and personal identity, and social relationships. Several of these attributes will be discussed within the current research, as it is assumed that these differences between a 'house' and a 'home' are key to whether or not an individual feels attached to the place in which they live.

Related to place attachment and ownership of a home is the idea of territoriality. In his book, Robert Gifford (2002) defines territoriality as; a pattern of behaviour and attitudes...based on perceived, attempted or actual control of a definable physical space...'. In 1975 Altman (as cited by many authors, for example Gifford, 2002) suggested a system of describing territoriality, which included the categories of primary, secondary and public territories; primary territories are of most relevance here as the home is an example of this type of territory. Primary territories are described as spaces which are owned by individuals, are central to their everyday lives and hold high psychological importance for these individuals. The key idea linking attachment to territoriality is personalisation; the marking of an object or an area in a way that shows the owner's identity. Becker and Coniglio (as cited by Bell, Greene, Fisher & Baum, 2001) suggest that personalisation of a territory may lead to more feelings of attachment to that territory and establishment of the idea that it is 'comfortable and homelike'. Altman and Chemers (as cited by Harris and Brown, 1996) claim that a strong commitment to the home, and therefore a strong attachment, may reflect a sense of control and pride of the owner over the property and this is echoed by Dovey (1985), who states that both the physical and symbolic boundaries of a house guarantee that the owner can control access to and behaviour within the property. According to Harris and Brown (1996) territories may lead to feelings of distinctiveness, privacy and a sense of personal identity; all of which are relevant to the current study.

The idea of personalisation of a territory is associated to the concept of place identity. Gifford (2002) defines place identity as the incorporation of a place into the larger sense of self. This usually occurs with places to which people feel a high level of attachment. Dovey (1985) has argued that identity involves a bonding of the person and place in such a way that the place takes its identity from the dweller, whilst the dweller takes their identity from the place. This author has also stated that the home is used as both a statement and mirror which reflects collective ideology as well as personal experiences. In this way it is possible for the home to uphold a temporal identity, which is connected to both the past and the future sense of self.

Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983, as cited by Knez, 2005) proposed place identity as a 'physical world socialisation of the self,' meaning that the development of identity involves distinguishing oneself not only from others, but also from the places in which people interact with each other. According to Neisser (1988, as cited by Knez, 2005), the longer a person stays in one place, the stronger the emotional bond is to that place. This in turn leads to that place becoming a bigger part of one's conceptual and extended self, implying that place attachment is necessary for place identity to occur (Knez, 2005). Place identity was considered by Proshansky (1978, as cited by Kyle et al, 2004) to be the cognitive connection between an individual and a setting and he argued that people are likely to become attached to places which reflect aspects of their own identity. Related to this as well as to the concept of territoriality, is the place attachment and identity experienced by those individuals who rent a property. According to Dovey (1985) renting causes problems for the experience of 'dwelling' through which the idea of 'home' emerges. The author argues that if the owner is personally identified with the property, there may be a clash of identities when the tenants try to make changes and adjustments to the property. The idea that renting a property leads to a lower degree of attachment and sense of identity is examined in the current research.

The framework of the interview schedule (see appendix A) for the current research is taken from Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996), who describe four processes on the topic of place identity. Using these four processes to structure the interview schedule provided a means to investigate how DIY affected place identity, and place attachment within the home. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) argue that all aspects of identity have place-related implications. This argument is based on Breakwell's model of identity (1986, 1992, 1993 as cited by Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) which states four principles for the motivation to express one's identity; distinctiveness, continuity, self esteem and self efficacy. A brief description of each process will be given here. Distinctiveness, the desire to preserve a personal uniqueness has been investigated by several authors (e.g. Feldman, 1990; Hummon, 1990, as cited by Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), with results showing that this process involves a person having a particular type of relationship with an environment that is very different from any other relationships that person holds. With regards to place attachment, it is suggested by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) that people who are highly attached to a place will identify themselves with this place and, through these identifications will distinguish themselves from others.

Continuity, the desire to withhold self-concept across time and situations, has been defined as having two components. First is place-referent continuity, whereby a place can act as a reference to past self and past experiences and is therefore seen as continuity of the person's identity. Hormuth (1990, as cited by Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) suggests that moving house may disrupt a sense of identity, such that the old and new houses represent two different identities. This sense of disruption is also experienced by students who move away from home to study at university. Chow and Healey (2008) found that majority of students experience feelings of displacement when moving away to university. This is because up until this point, home has provided their basis for safety, security and identity and they are now leaving this behind. Many students experience home sickness, which when using the argument proposed by Case (1996), may be explained by the realisation of the significance of place identity with regards to home; according to Case (1996) this realisation occurs when journeying away from home, as the bond between a person and a place is under threat. Related to this Dixon and Durrheim (2004, as cited by Chow and Healey, 2008) contend that loss of place causes psychological responses because it involves a loss of self. This highlights the importance of place-referent continuity with regards to place identity.

The second component of continuity is place-congruent continuity, whereby continuity is achieved by generic characteristics in the environment which are congruent with a person's identity; i.e. people choose to live in places that represent their values (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Environments can be modified in order to better suit these values, and DIY and gardening are two ways in which this modification is achieved. People are likely to hold a high level attachment with a place which preserves both place-referent and place-congruent continuity of personal identity.

Self-esteem, the positive evaluation of oneself, is concerned with a person's feeling of self-worth. A central motive within identity theory is the desire to uphold a positive view of the self. With regards to environmental psychology, Korpela (1989, as cited by Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) claim that the qualities of a favourite environment boost self-esteem, and a positive evaluation of this environment may relate to a person's self-esteem. A high level of attachment to a place will cause that

place to induce a high level of self-esteem within an individual. This is somewhat related to the final process; self efficacy, which is to do with a person's belief in their own abilities to meet demands that the situation may put upon them. A high level of self-efficacy is maintained when an environment is manageable and as such supports a person's everyday lifestyle. People are more likely to hold a high level of attachment with places which uphold this high level of self-efficacy. Jorgensen and Stedman (2001, as cited by Kyle et al, 2004) also discuss the issue of self efficacy, but under the term of place dependence which they define as the extent to which a particular environment allows for the attainment of goals, in comparison to other environments. Wallenius (1999) investigated properties of the environment which are associated with high and low levels of perceived supportiveness to a person's daily functioning and found that this notion is a complex interplay between the person and the environment. Personal projects which were practical, attainable and socially supported appeared to receive the strongest support from the environment, and the perceived supportiveness of the environment was found to be associated with life satisfaction.

The current research aims to investigate the attachment that people feel towards their homes, the reasons for this attachment and whether the attachment can be affected by carrying out DIY on the property. Since DIY is a way of modifying the home environment in order that it better suits the needs of the individuals living there, it is expected that successful DIY will increase the feelings of attachment that owners feel towards their properties. The research is also interested in the way in which DIY is used by home owners as a way of personalising their territory, whilst and therefore providing a reflection of their own identity. Of particular interest is how this is achieved by couples who, when carrying out DIY together may wish to input both of their individual identities into the property. The topics of joint identity and attachment, and the effects that DIY within the home can have on these are thought to be particularly interesting as there is little previous research on these ideas. Indeed, Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) explain how little research has been carried out with regard to attachment to a house or a street, but instead most has focused on neighbourhood attachment. Oddly, it is to these areas which have received the most research interest, that the fewest number of people are attached (Cuba & Hummon, 1993, as cited by Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

The chosen methodology for the current study is the qualitative approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Phenomenology is interested in the phenomena that occur within our consciousness as we engage with the world around us. IPA is a form of the phenomenological method and was originally founded by Jonathon Smith (as cited by Willig, 2001), with the aim of understanding the participants' experience from their own perspective (Willig, 2001). IPA uses semi-structured interviews, whereby questions are open ended but specific questions in order to persuade participants to give more elaborate and detailed answers. Using this idiographic approach, observations and understanding about the participants' experiences are a result of thorough, in-depth involvement with each participant's transcript treated as an individual case from the others.

IPA assumes that what a participant says is linked to their emotional state, but it is important for researchers to remember that this link isn't completely clear-cut. Thus it is necessary to use different methods to interpret the data. Research using IPA involves an active role for the researcher because a two-stage interpretation process called a 'double hermeneutic' is necessary. The participant is trying to make



sense of his/her world, whilst the researcher is trying to make sense of how the participant is making sense of his/her world (Lyons & Coyle, 2007), and for the researcher this involves second-order sense making of someone else's experiences.

There have been several criticisms of IPA. For example, the fact that it relies on language as the means for understanding a person's experiences poses two problems. Firstly, some participants may not be capable of expressing these experiences in such a way that the researcher can fully understand the participant's perceptions of these experiences. The second problem with this heavy reliance on language is that it is impossible to simply express an experience; the words used to do so have meanings themselves, which add to what the participant is trying to say. Therefore access to a person's experiences is only indirect (Willig, 2001). Despite these criticisms, it was decided for the current study that because of the nature of the information required, IPA would be the most appropriate method. This appeared to be the best way of collecting rich and detailed data from the participants, and encouraging them to discuss the issues that were of the highest importance to them, with regards to the attachment and reflection of identity they felt they had within their homes. The analytical procedure of IPA is highly systematic and results in an especially detailed account of the participants' experiences (Willig, 2001). IPA allows for identification of themes which are significant to the participants and the events that occur in their life. Through analysis of these themes and their significance within the interview transcripts both individually and collectively, it is possible to gain insight to the participants' sense of their own identity and the meanings that they understand and create from their own experiences (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

### **Summary of rationale**

The aim of this study is to investigate people's attachment to their home; the sense of identity they experience within the home and how completion of DIY may affect both of these concepts. Of particular interest is the reflection of the personal identities of couples carrying out DIY together.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Ten individuals participated in this experiment. Eight of the participants were female undergraduate students from the University of Plymouth who signed up to the study as part of a course requirement, and these participants were interviewed in a research facility within the university. The remaining two participants were male, were known to the experimenter to have undertaken DIY and were interviewed in their respective homes. One of these participants was a student, living with his girlfriend and four other housemates in a university house. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 45 years (see appendix B for full participant details). To take part in the study participants were required to be living with a partner in rented or owned property in which they had carried out DIY tasks. One of the student participants was living with a group of friends rather than with a partner.

### **Materials**

Participants read the brief (see appendix C) and then signed the consent form (see appendix in the attached envelope). The interviews were recorded using a digital

Dictaphone and at the end participants were given the debrief (see appendix E). All printed documents, including the researcher's interview schedule were created using a word processor.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. The semi-structured interview schedule allowed participants to discuss their answers within the experimenter's desired framework. The schedule consisted of five sections. Section one included questions about the participants' current living situation, section two contained questions about feelings towards the house, section three asked about the DIY undertaken on the property and how this had affected feelings towards the house, section four enquired about the reflection of the participants' identity through DIY projects, and finally section five enquired about the participants' demographic information.

### **Analysis**

The interviews were transcribed using an orthographic method, in order to display the non-verbal features of speech such as pauses, laughter, sighs and unfinished sentences. Whilst transcribing the interviews the researcher made notes on any interesting or significant points that appeared in the discussion. The interview transcripts were then analysed using the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, as described by Smith and Osborn (2008) and Lyons and Cole (2007). According to these authors this method of analysis involves a 'double-hermeneutic'; the participant is trying to make sense of how they experience their world, whilst at the same time the researcher is trying to make sense of how the participant makes sense of their world (Smith and Osborn, 2008).

During several readings of the transcripts, the researcher used the left hand side of the transcript to make notes on interesting or significant comments from the participant. These initial comments were then transformed, on the right hand side of the transcript into a list of themes or phrases which illustrated what had been said by the participant, and many of these themes occurred more than once throughout the interview. Next, the themes were clustered together with other associated themes, and an overarching name was given to each of these clusters. Throughout this process it was necessary to continuously refer back to the original transcript in order to ascertain that the analysis was staying as close as possible to what the participant had actually said. Following this, the clusters were put into a table (see appendices H-Q) with the illustrative quotes for each of the themes, and when this had been completed for every transcript a master table of themes was created. This table consisted of the themes that were recurring or highly significant in the initial tables, with all the relevant quotes from each of the participants. Again, these themes were clustered together with other associated themes. From this master table the researcher highlighted those themes which appeared to be the most predominant or interesting throughout the interviews and these were discussed in the write up of the analysis.

## Analysis and Discussion

Table 1

Cluster	Theme	Evidence
Personalisation	Personalisation	<p>'You can't personalise a rented property...' <b>P#1F, page 5, line 233.</b></p> <p>when it doesn't look very nice and it doesn't really feel like yours, you don't feel very attached to it. <b>P#5F, page 4, lines 150-151.</b></p>
Achievements	First house	<p>'...look we've managed to get our first house...' <b>P#2F, page 1, line 46</b></p> <p>'...our first home together...' <b>P#3F, page 1, line 45</b></p> <p>'...it was mine and it was my first home...' <b>P#6F, page 5, lines 202-203.</b></p>
Attachment	'Home'	<p>'...when you're able to put your own stamp on things more it does make it feel more like a home...' <b>P#3F, page 1, lines 31-33.</b></p> <p>'...if it wasn't for the fact of that then yeah, I love my home...' <b>P#7F, page 2, lines 67-68.</b></p> <p>'...really consider this place to be home...more like a place to live rather than a place that I could call home' <b>P#8M, lines 81-84</b></p>
Attachment	Affection/attachment	<p>'...I loved it. So I think I am quite emotionally attached to it...' <b>P#6F, page 3, lines 89-90.</b></p> <p>'...always look back on that quite fondly...' <b>P#3F, page 1, lines 46-47</b></p> <p>'...if it wasn't for...that...I love my home' <b>P#7F, page 2, lines 67-68</b></p>
Achievements	Achievements	<p>'...I think also as well it shows your achievements...' <b>P#2F, page 2, line 78.</b></p>
Achievements	Pride/showing off	<p>'...very proud of the fact that people comment on it...' <b>P#7F, page 7, lines 274-275.</b></p> <p>'I'm proud of the work we've done on it...' <b>P#10M, page 3, line 87.</b></p>
Attachment	Memories	<p>'...we were living in that house when we got married, and I left from that house in the cars and everything, so it's like we started off our life in there...' <b>P#7F, page 3, lines 130-131.</b></p> <p>'...always look back to when we moved into the flat...' <b>P#3F, page 1, lines 44-45.</b></p>
Personalisation	Distinctiveness	<p>'...when people come to your house and if it was all the same it would be kind of boring...' <b>P#2F, page 3, lines 134-135.</b></p> <p>'...like to be different, not to be wacky different...stand out...as an individual...' <b>P#7F, page 7, lines 273-274.</b></p>
Personalisation	Identity	<p>'...when you put your own stamp on it, you do create your own personality to it...' <b>P#6F, page 5, lines 189-191.</b></p> <p>'...it's like a reflection of what I'm like...I think I'm better with that than I am even with clothes and stuff...' <b>P#7F, page 6, lines 296-297.</b></p> <p>'...like when you're able to put you're stamp on things more it does make it feel more like a home lines...' <b>P#3F, page 1, lines 31-33.</b></p>
Attachment	Misses previous house	<p>'...we were so happy then...we were just really happy for a while...look back on that as quite a content time...' <b>P#3F, page 4, lines 153-160.</b></p>

Analysis of the interview transcripts found nine clusters of themes which were apparent within most, if not all of the participants' responses. A summary of these can be seen in Table 1. Of these nine clusters, three were considered to highlight the most prominent factors and influences within the participants' understanding of their feelings towards their house and the DIY work they had undertaken. These three clusters will each be discussed in turn.

The first cluster has been named 'personalisation' as the themes linked within it are relevant to how people personalise and make a property their own. The strongest theme within this cluster is the issue of distinctiveness and being different from others. Although this issue was discussed by several participants, there were two in particular for who it seemed to a very important aspect of DIY, attachment and personalising the property.

P#2F describes how it is important for her to be able show off her personality through the DIY which she has undertaken;

...it is sort of showing a bit of your personality as well, like when people come to your house and if it was all the same it would be kind of boring, but everyone loves going to other people's houses and thinking 'oh what have you done here'... Page 3, lines 133-136.

For this participant displaying her individual tastes and how these are different from others is important for how people perceive both herself and her house. This implies that she perceives her house as an extension of her identity, about which others can form an opinion. The participant also explains how she has adjusted her methods of decoration in order to achieve her desire to be distinctive within the constraints that are present from living in a rented a property;

IE: ...I've always been the kind of person, I don't want to look like everyone else's house, I want to be different and so...

IR: So being different is something that is important to you?

IE: Definitely yeh, one of the things that I've kind of worked with being in a rented place and we've got to keep the neutral colours is kind of decorating with accessories; you know cushions on the sofa and stuff...' Page 5, lines 255-270.

This can be related to the literature from Dovey (1985) as it seems to agree with what this author has said; renting has appeared to constrain the type of work that the participant has been able to carry out. However, contrary to Dovey (1985) this particular participant seems to have used this to her advantage in expressing her identity through DIY, by finding a method of decorating which is distinctive to herself.

Another participant, for whom distinctiveness appears to be an important issue is P#7F, who explains that being different and standing out from the crowd, in terms of her house is something which she feels proud about;

I like, yeah I do like to be different, not to be wacky different, just to stand out slightly as an individual, erm...I'm very proud of the fact that people comment on it (her house), this lady said to me 'where is it that you live' and I said 'oh at the bottom of Biggin Hill' and they said 'where's that' and I said 'oh you know just after the last chicane on the left,' and then they go 'oh you're not the one with the wall around it and that nice driveway and that are you?...' Page 7, lines 273-280.

This can be linked to the work by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) who claimed that distinctiveness is achieved when identification to the place is used by an individual to distinguish them self from others. P#7F expresses this desire for her house to be different from those around her and, in conjunction with Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) positively distinguishes herself from other residents in the area.

Identity through DIY, the second theme within this cluster appears to be more significant for the female than for the male participants, as whilst the one of the male participants did discuss how this was important to him, the discussion did not involve the same amount of detail that was included in discussions with the female participants. This is consistent with previous research on this topic, as Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) found that over several different types of areas including the home, women show greater attachment to place than men. Possibly as a result of this, majority of the female participants within this study discuss their attachment to home and the DIY they have carried, with no or little reference to their partner's attachment and identity within the home.

P#7F describes how she uses her choice of decoration to express her sense of self, something which is typically done through people's choice of clothing;

Yeh, and one of my friends, I love everything she does and when she came round to mine and saw like the colours in my bedroom and stuff like that, she's like 'ahh that's so nice and really stylish' and stuff like that and I'm like 'ohh thank you,' cos obviously it's like a reflection of what I'm like...I think I'm better with that than I am even with clothes and stuff, I think I'm more better at showing my personality in my, in what I do with my decor, if you know what I mean? Page 7, lines 292-299.

Throughout her interview this participant expresses an enjoyment of DIY, and along with this seems to be particularly good at making the right choices so that her aims for the DIY are met. This is likely to be the reason that she is proud of her house as standing out from the others in the street. This reflection of identity is associated with place-referent continuity as described by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996), in that this type of continuity is achieved when an individual's attachment is focussed around the match between themselves and their environment. As she has successfully achieved a reflection of her identity within the decor of her home, the match between this participant and her home appears to be a good one.

P#6F along with most of the other participants in this study, defines the reflection of identity through DIY, as 'putting your own stamp' on the property. This implies that a sense of ownership and control of the space is instilled into the property when carrying out DIY;

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*...I'm kind of a home bird so I do feel, you know I like to go home and feel safe and comfortable, erm I can't say that it makes me feel warm cos it don't (laughs) but I mean having that homey feeling, cos when you put your own stamp on it, you do create your own personality to it, so just errr...yeh I am a home bird, so I don't know just comforts, I dunno I can't really explain it. Page 5, lines 186-192.

This sense of ownership has occurred for many of the participants despite the fact that most live in rented properties and although many have expressed a desire to have the opportunity to carry out more personalisation on their property, most have

found a way around this constraint in order to modify their home in a way which best suits their personal tastes. An exception to this is P#3F;

IR: OK...and was there anything similar or different about this house compared to the other houses you've lived in?

IE: Erm yeh...obviously you know because you can't make your mark on it as such you know...basically with the arrangement everything you do to the house when you move out you've got to put it back so you can't put pictures- well you could put pictures on the wall but you'd have too, you know fill the holes in and everything when you leave and we're not sure how long we're gonna be there so...when we moved into the flat that we bought it was totally different because it was our first place that we lived together and erm...we decided to knock all the walls down and make it open plan so, it was only a one bedroom place cos obviously we hadn't had my daughter then so it was fine for us, but yeh we knocked walls down, did the bathroom, did the...and then when my daughter came along we totally re-did the and...and erm yeh it did feel you know like when you're able to put you're stamp on things more it does make it feel more like a home even though, really it was quite strange cos that was tiny, it's only one bedroom but it feels sort of all yours really... Page 1, lines 17-34

This excerpt is consistent with the claims from Dovey (1985) which were discussed earlier.

The final theme within this cluster is the theme of 'personalisation' itself. This theme amalgamates all the others within this cluster, in that creating a sense of identity and being distinctive is achieved by personalising a property with the occupants' personal preferences. Achieving personalisation of a property affects the feeling of ownership and control. The motivation to personalise a property is expressed by most participants and the most significant examples of this follow;

I suppose yeh, you get when it does look nicer you feel a lot more attached to the house, when it doesn't look very nice and it doesn't really feel like yours, you don't feel very attached to it. P#5F, page 4, lines 149-151.

You can't personalise a rented property...you can do to a certain extent but at some point you can't. It's like in the kitchen, half the surface is taken up by the microwave. If it was my house I'd knock out part of the cupboard on the left hand side, cos we've got one of those really tall cupboards... P#1F, page 5, lines 233-237.

The cluster 'personalisation' highlights the importance that a sense of ownership and identity can have on the way occupants feel about their house. It is obvious that through DIY, ownership and identity can easily be manipulated, which in turn can influence attachment.

Within the next cluster; attachment, an important point that arose throughout most of the interviews was the participants' distinction between living in a house and a 'home.' As discussed in the introduction to this research, there appears to be a 'romantic ideal' that people are aiming for when buying a house and creating their personal identity within a house. This point is illustrated by Wright (1993, as cited by Moore, 2000) who identifies the complex ideology of home, which she explains is an imposed ideal, as well as a cultural and individual ideal. This concept of 'home' is initiated and maintained by a person's sense of attachment to their property and involves the people and activities that individuals associate with their house. For some of the current participants this involved spending time with their family or

partner, whilst for others it was simply the sense of comfort and security which they felt as a result of being in the house.

P#3F felt a sense of 'home' in the first house she lived in with her husband, as it marked the start of their life together and is also related to the personalisation of the property;

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*...it did feel you know like, when you're able to put your own stamp on things more it does make it feel more like a home even though, really it was quite strange cos that was tiny, it's only got one bedroom but it feels sort of all yours really. Page 1, lines 31-34.

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*...I suppose when you first move in together you're building a home aren't you, and although my husband actually bought it, my name wasn't on the mortgage or anything I felt as though I had to contribute in some other way so that was like, you know deciding what colours we were going to decorate things and actually painting the walls and stuff and just sort of making sure that you did it together so that you could both say that it was you know your home and your work sort of thing. Page 3, lines 135-142.

This last passage also shows that when buying a home and personalising it as a couple, both partners will have a separate attachment to the property as well as probably having a joint attachment, and it is important to work together in order that both partners can feel attached and think of the property as a 'home.' For this participant, building her first home together with her husband is part of the reason she feels so attached to this property. She has a particularly strong attachment to her first home, especially in comparison to the house in which she is currently living. The participant has particularly happy memories of her life when she lived in her first house and seems to miss living in the property, and the life she had there;

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*...I always look back to when we moved into the flat, I don't know if it was because it was our first home together and then my daughter came along, but you know I always look back on that time quite fondly really, I guess you do, I've heard a lot of people talking about their first flat quite fondly...but yeah it's nice to have the space to be honest. Page 1, lines 44-49.

IR: And was it a success, did you, do you think you achieved what you wanted to?  
IE: Yeh definitely I think, we were so happy then, obviously coming to uni is so stressful that it puts such a strain on your relationship and when we were just living in that flat and didn't have much else going on we were just really happy and just concentrated on that house, you know the flat, and it was our first home and like I said when our daughter came along...you know we were just really happy...for a while, then it got really small and cramped but yeh we well...I always look back on that time as quite a content time so I guess that must say something. Page 4, lines 151-161.

Hormuth (1990, as cited by Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) has claimed that deciding to move can cause a change in one's own concept. He argues that the old house represents an old self-identity whilst the new house is seen as an opportunity to form a new identity. This doesn't appear to be the case for P#3F, who has not only had a baby and moved house, but has also recently started university, and all of these are situations which are likely to have a huge influence on a persons' self concept and

sense of identity. P#3F holds happy memories of her time in the flat she first bought with her husband and appears to be somewhat nostalgic of the time they had there when she had very few stresses in her life. In moving to her current house, there appears to have been a trade-off between her self-efficacy and her self-esteem; the first flat was very small and so didn't allow the participant to go about her daily life in a manner which best suited her, however she has lots of fond memories of this home, was very happy there and felt content within herself after completing the DIY that was carried out on the flat.

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)...*I'd never really been bothered about houses or DIY, but yeh I felt really content then and like I'd be a good Mum because you know I'd bought nice furniture and it was quite relaxing in a way. Page 3, lines 102-105.

In comparison, the house that the participant is living in currently is bigger and situated close to university therefore giving her better facilities to carry out her everyday tasks. Despite this, the participant doesn't seem to have a particularly a high attachment to this house and because of the stresses currently present in her life (i.e. university work and looking after a child) which she associates with this house, doesn't feel a high level of self-esteem either. This can be seen in the following two extracts.

IR: Erm and would you say you're emotionally attached to your new house, do you feel the same way?

IE: Erm...perhaps I am and I just don't realise it, I think because I've got so much going on at the minute with uni and everything, it's more of a necessity that I've got the space in the spare room... *(Last part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*. Page 2, lines 50-54.

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)* I have to live here, it's not that I don't like living there it's quite, it's in quite a homogenised street, all the houses look the same and it's not where I'd choose to live if I didn't have so much going on, but like I said it's just perfect with you know, perfect walking distance from uni... *(Last part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*. Page 3, lines 115-119.

Another participant who has a strong connection to his current accommodation as a 'home' as opposed to a 'house' is P#8M. This participant lives in a university house, sharing with his girlfriend and four other housemates. The participant lived in the property with his girlfriend during the summer, as well as during university term time.

IR: Is there something about the house or the area that is similar or different to houses you have previously lived in?

IE: Oh erm...not much really, this is the biggest house I have ever lived in. I guess possibly...there isn't any really isn't really any similarities...erm well it's, other than the fact that I do really consider this place to be home, there have been houses I've lived in and they have been more like place to live rather than a place that I could call home. Page 2, lines 64-84.

It is particularly interesting that this participant thinks of his university house as his home, as it is in a town a long way from where his family are and where he lived as a child. From previous research on this topic (e.g. Chow & Healey, 2008), it would be



expected that he would think of his family house as home, rather than his university house. A possible reason for these different feelings expressed by this participant is that, in comparison to the students in the Chow and Healey (2008) study, this is the first house in which he has lived with his girlfriend and, being at university, is living as an independent individual and may associate this property with these exciting times of his life. He has also been able to decorate his own personal space in the house and may therefore feel more attached to the property because of this, than other university students who may not have this opportunity.

Again, within this cluster there is one particular theme which unites all the other themes; this is the theme of affection and attachment. The concept of 'home' as opposed to a house arises from the fact that people become attached to their property, because of, for example the memories of events that have taken place within the house or because of the people who live there. Within all of the interviews there are examples of this feeling of attachment, which is increased through DIY carried out in the home. Some of the strongest examples will be discussed here. P#6F displays a lot of attachment to her current flat, and it seems that part of her attachment stems from the fact that this is a flat that she shares with her partner, as well as the fact that this flat has features which she likes but has never has in any of her previous houses;

IR: How would you say you feel about your current house, would you say that you are emotionally attached to it?

IE: Erm well we did discuss moving to erm my partner's friends place and erm when he said this, this is why I know my answer, it's because when he said it's a lovely house and I'm going 'but what about our flat?' You know that house has got central heating and double glazing but (*inaudible*), in such a short space of time, I think it's because I've never had a back door; upstairs just didn't and house sharing's different anyway and when I used to live in Efford, didn't have a back door just a front door, so the, this is going to sound silly, the first, I don't know how long a couple of days and then a couple of weeks later, I'd sit on the kitchen floor with the door open and just sit there thinking 'this is nice, I can look' and I kept saying to my partner 'look I can see outside' (laughs) it was amazing, I loved it. So I think I am quite emotionally attached to it. Page2 , lines 75-90.

P#7F provides a brilliant example of how a relationship with a property can be more complex than simply being, or not being emotionally attached. When there are good and bad memories associated with a property attachment can involve very mixed emotions;

IR: Could you tell me how you feel about your current house, would you say that you are emotionally attached to it?

IE: Yes and no (sighs). Well erm, my husband had an accident last year so it's not practical now, which is a shame so we have to move which we will be doing shortly, as soon as...well we're having our last room plastered as we speak, random innit...erm once that's all done we're obviously gonna look into moving to a bungalow cos it's more practical but, if it wasn't for the fact of that then yeah, I love my home... Page 2, lines 60-68.

The participant has very happy memories of this house as it is where she started her life with her husband, which makes her feel a strong attachment to the property; whilst simultaneously having very sad memories which weaken this attachment;

IR: Would you say that you're more attached to this house than other houses you've lived in previously?

IE: Yeah oh yeah

IR: And what do you think it is about this house, is it just the work (*DIY*) again?

IE: No I think it's erm, we were living in that house when we got married, and I left from that house in the cars and everything, so it's like we started off our life in there...but then it's like the worst two years of my life have been in there as well so it's quite like a mixed emotion, but I think the good outweighs the bad. Page 3, lines 125-134.

This participant's situation also highlights the different ways in which partners within a couple can hold different attachments to the same property;

IR: Erm...ok, you said you have to move because your partner had an accident, erm do you think that you will be quite sad to leave the house, you said that you're quite attached to it?

IE: I will be, he...I think he just wants to see the back of it, I think that's how he feels but I said it's sad cos we're finally getting the last room done, it's taken us all this time to do it and we're literally going to slap it on the market once all this is done...you know...and I feel, I am a little bit gutted... Page 8, lines 318-325.

The final cluster to be discussed has been called achievements, as the themes involved show that for majority of the participants, completing successful DIY projects leads to a sense of achievement within the property and this in turn, leads them to feel a greater attachment. In terms of the four processes of attachment and identity outlined by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996), this sense of achievement relates to self-esteem as feeling good about oneself as a result of the work that had been carried out on the property. Throughout the interview P#2F continually expresses the positive results of feeling as though she has achieved something, not just in her home but in her life in general. The house is seen as a symbol of status and of a desired lifestyle, thus boosting the participant's self esteem and attachment to the property;

IR: Would you say, you say that you're quite attached to this house cos it's your first house, so that's, is it an ownership thing that affects that attachment? Like you can say that's mine, as you said it's your first house?

IE: Erm yeh maybe, I think also as well it shows your achievements that you know you've managed to get yourself a house and get yourself settled and start yourself up with everything so...I suppose compared to uni when you're living in a shared house, or something like that, I think you know the ownership kind of does have a lot to it cos you can say that's my house, look what I've done, whereas when you're sharing with other people it's sort of like, that's where I live so yeh and I definitely think it makes it feel more like a home I suppose. Page 2, lines 74-86.

Within this passage the participant also points out another theme in this cluster which adds to the sense of achievement and attachment that is obtained from carrying out DIY; pride. This again relates to the fact that having a nice house appears to boost

one's self esteem. Several of the participants expressed this sense of pride when talking about their home.

Yeah...I'm proud of the work we've done on it and we've put an extension on it you know...40' wide and 25' long. P#10M, page 3, lines 87-88.

For this participant, P#10M, pride appears to be the only feeling related to attachment to his house, as throughout the majority of the interview it is clear that he views the property merely as somewhere to live. The upkeep of his house appears to be somewhat of a chore and this is likely to be related to the size of the property, as well as the fact that there are so many people who live there and are dependent upon him. The participant doesn't appear to hold any negative feelings about his house, but merely appears to be apathetic towards it and certainly doesn't seem as committed as other participants. This again could be related to the fact that males tend to feel less attached than females (Dovey, 1985).

IR: How do you feel about your current house, would you say that you are emotionally attached to it?

IE: I like it yeh...

IR: Can you elaborate that a little bit, why do you like it?

IE: Erm...I like it because it's a house...erm it's a nice house, it's a nice area...it's...

P#10M, page 1, lines 24-29.

IR: How does your house make you feel about yourself?

IE: Poor (laughs lots) if I'm being honest

IR: (laughs) OK...so why does it make you feel poor?

IE: It costs a fortune to keep and run. P#10M, Page 2, lines 81-85

When asked to elaborate about how he feels towards his house the participant uses physical features of the house and its location as reasons for liking the property. Other participants who have expressed a much higher level of attachment have instead talked about significant events that have happened in their life which have affected their attachment to their home. It may be the case that, as P#10M is older than the other participants and has already lived through most of these significant events in his life, that these no longer seem exciting or a reason to affect his attachment. This finding conflicts with those of Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), who found that attachment to place increases with age. The possible reason for this could be the short length of time for which the participant has lived the property; however this seems unlikely as other participants reported more feelings of attachment to a property which they had been living in for an even shorter period of time than this participant had been living in his house.

The interview with P#10M also illustrates how self-efficacy is affected by DIY, but not always in a straight forward manner;

IR: You said that there wasn't enough space when you moved in with your children, has having a bigger house and doing the project that you did, has that made the house more manageable for you and made day to day living easier?

IE: It's made day to day living easier but it's made an awful lot more cleaning and daily managements...

IR: So it's easier but harder as well?

IE: Yeah because there is a lot more area to clean and keep clean and...

IR: So, but it was worth doing for the improvements that it made?

IE: Yeah, it has its ups and downs but yeah. Page 4, lines 169-180.

This shows that there are many life factors that affect attachment to a property, and for this participant having a lot of children, which necessitates having a large property, appears to be a stressful situation which detracts from his sense of attachment.

The final theme within this cluster is 'first home.' For many of the participants within this study, their current house or the house they felt most attached to, is their first house; either with their current partners or by themselves. This fact appears to increase attachment as it is a significant event which marks the start of an important part of these people's lives. For some of the participants, owning or renting a house is seen as a symbol of status and as an achievement in life which is valued by most participants.

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)...*look we've managed to get our first house and decorate yourself... *(Last part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)* P#2F, page 1, lines 46-47.

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)...*I don't know if it was because it was our first home together... *(Last part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)* P#3F, page 1, line 45

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)...*I didn't chose that house really and I loved it because it was mine and it was my first home, I was with a different partner then, or relationship was really good a t that point... *(Last part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)...*P#6F, page 5, lines 201-204.

IR: And what makes you...what makes you think this house is home, what is it about this house

IE: Erm the fact that erm that it....that...I've erm...put my personal touch to the house really and it's the first sort of house that I've actually had the opportunity to make my own. P#8M, page 2, lines 86-91.

All of the participants who were living in a rented house expressed a desire to own a house together with their partner; P#3F in particular felt as though she hadn't made as much as a contribution to the flat she owned with her partner because her name wasn't on the mortgage. Her aim, once she had finished university was to have her name on the mortgage jointly with her partner.

*(First part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)...*when I get to where I'm going and I'm earning a bit of money, I'm hoping to buy, you know with my husband, actually get my name on the mortgage then, buy somewhere nice and then just yeh make it really sort of my own thing...*(Last part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*. P#3F, page 5, lines 205-209.

You can't personalise a rented property, you can do to a certain extent but at some point you can't... *(Last part of passage isn't relevant and is therefore not included)*. P#1F, page 5, lines 233-234.

The desire for equal ownership shows that it is important for both members of the couple to feel involved with the house, and that regardless of how much DIY tenants are allowed to carry out on a rented property, a sense of ownership still seems to affect attachment.

Part of the research question was to investigate the reflection of a couples' joint identity within their home, through DIY. Most of the participants' responses related only to their own sense of attachment and identity, with a few exceptions who discussed these concepts in relation to their partner. As a result of this the current data doesn't necessarily address this part of the research question. This may be due to a flaw in the interview procedure and will be discussed in the conclusion.

## **Conclusion**

The current research started out with the intention of investigating the attachment that people feel towards their homes, the reasons for this attachment and whether the attachment can be affected by carrying out DIY on the property. The research question aimed to investigate the way in which DIY is used by home owners as a way of personalising their territory, whilst simultaneously providing a reflection of their own identity. The researcher was particularly interested in how this is achieved by couples who, when carrying out DIY together may wish to input both of their individual identities into the property.

The findings show that the home is clearly a place to which most people become closely attached. This attachment appears to be affected by a reflection of identity within the home, which in turn is affected by a sense of ownership, as participants who have the opportunity to carry out DIY projects in order to personalise the house felt more attached to their home. These participants also seemed to show a tendency to be happier than those participants who could carry out less extensive DIY. Another factor of attachment which seemed to be prominent within this particular sample was living with a partner for the first time. For many of the participants having their first home, particularly with their partner, significantly increased their attachment to the property compared to those participants who were now in their second or third home with their partner. This may be due to the novelty of a first home and the somewhat 'romantic ideal' that appears to be present within society of creating a 'home' with a partner. This distinction between a 'house' and a 'home' also appears to be a large factor within home owners' attachment to their property. Participants who are living in a house which they have chosen only as a result of money or location and not because they would actually like to live there tended to talk about the property as a house as opposed to a home and are less attached than those who have chosen to build a home with their partner within the property.

DIY projects did appear to increase the reflection of identity that the participants felt within their own homes, and 'putting my own stamp on it' was a phrase which appeared on multiple occasions in most of the interviews. One part of the research question which hasn't been fully addressed by the current findings is how couples achieve the reflection of their joint identities within the home. Whilst there are hints among the data from the female participants that their male partners simply aren't as interested in this part of DIY, a suggestion which may improve future research within this area is that the interviews are carried out with either both members of the couple present at the same time, or with separate interviews for both people. From this it would be possible to gain an understanding of attachment and identity from the perspective of both members of the couple, which would lead to a more detailed understanding of the effects of DIY projects in the home. Another way

in which the interview process could be improved is by conducting the interview with the participants in their home, as this would allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of how the couple interact with their home surroundings. The researcher would also be able to actually view the DIY projects that have been undertaken, which again would allow for a deeper insight to how this has affected the participants' home life.

In terms of the methodology used, IPA made it possible for the researcher to fully interact and become involved with the data, through the process of a double hermeneutic, so that it was possible for the researcher to identify significant and recurring themes both within individual, and across the collective interviews. The use of the four identity processes suggested by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) as the structure of the interview schedule, also provided the opportunity to gain specific information from the participants, whilst also leaving the questions open ended enough so as to allow the participants to elaborate and speak freely on issues that were important to their own understanding of their attachment. In terms of the participants used, future research may benefit from investigating attachment to home within a bigger sample which spans a more varied age range, more variety within gender (only two of the ten participants in the present study were male), and a wider variety of occupation, as all but one of the current sample were students.

In addition to highlighting areas for future research which will be discussed later, the current findings can be applied in particular to two areas with regards to housing and home development. Firstly, as personalisation, distinctiveness and a sense of identity appear to be such important factors in participants' attachment to their home, it is probable that these issues will also be important when making decisions about how to decorate and modify the property. An important implication for home improvement stores would therefore be to ensure that the processes through which customers select and purchase DIY tools and accessories can be as personalised as possible. For example some home improvement companies already have in place schemes that allow customers to choose the exact design, colour and layout etc of kitchen cupboards and work spaces. Extending this choice to other areas of the house, for example furniture for the lounge or bedroom, will enable to home owners to easily achieve a DIY project which they will feel is distinctive and personal to them. Another area where these findings could be used is within lettings agencies and concerns the contract rules about DIY work which tenants are allowed to undertake in rented properties. Landlords would be able to increase their income and the stability of it if tenants were allowed to personalise the properties to a greater extent. A higher level of personalisation and therefore sense of ownership is more likely to lead to a higher level of attachment, and this may encourage tenants to stay in one property for longer, rather than moving to another property where the landlord may allow them to carry out more extensive DIY projects.

Whilst carrying out the present study, the researcher became aware of topics which seemed to hold particular significance for these participants, yet seemed to be lacking research interest in previous literature. There are three points which hold particular interest for the researcher as areas for future study. Firstly, the idea that young couples seem particularly attached to their first home. This is a topic which was discussed by several participants in the current study, but investigations into why this is appear not to have been undertaken by literature that is currently available. Secondly, there is some research on how natural outdoor environments can have restorative effects for people (e.g. Gross & Lane, 2007). Several of the current

participants discuss life stresses and situations that affect their attachment to their homes and an interesting topic for future research may be to investigate restorative environments within the home, how people relax and how the home can help them to do this. Finally, many of the female participants within this study expressed the notion that their male partners had less interest than themselves in personalising the property in such a way that it could be an extension of the self and a reflection of their identity. Why is this? Is this due to a tendency among females to want to build a 'nice' home where it is possible to build a stable environment for a family? This last issue is a topic which holds a lot of interest for the researcher, but is an area where there appears to be a big gap within the literature.

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## Appendices

The appendices to this report can be viewed in the folder 'Supplementary Files' located in the Reading Tools menu list.